It was a glorious Easter morning at IUCC!

Photos courtesy of Sarah Fiske-Phillips
Palm Sunday at IUCC
Photos courtesy of Sarah Fiske-Phillips & Tricia Aynes
IUCC members spotted out in the Community

March for our Lives on Saturday, March 24
Photos courtesy of Vivian Johnson

Great American Write-In on Saturday, March 24
Photos courtesy of Tricia Aynes
April at IUCC is a “marker moment” for me. This month I move into my 13th year with you. It is hard to believe another year has gone by so swiftly and there is so much coming our way in 2018.

At the risk of sounding like the boy who cried “wolf,” I think it’s safe to say the new building wing is really happening. When you come on Sunday mornings, you’ll see some real progress! Before it got dark on Maundy Thursday, I was able to look outside through the chain-link fence and see clearly defined spaces as the crew gets ready to pour cement for the pad. There are the three meeting rooms. A little further down, there is the entrance into the office space, and there at the corner closest to the driveway and Alton Parkway, is my office—with another staff office right across from me, and a new patio that will give some green space “indoors.”

You are coming to church! Tommie Kozlov and I sat down with attendance records from 2018 and discovered that our construction-site church services are only down by 2-3% over last year at this time despite the obstacles.

I’m impressed by how well the congregation is managing to work around the fences, alternate entry and the general hubbub of construction. To this we add one more piece: the sanctuary building is going to have sprinklers built in, followed by new paint. On April 8, please come back and see how it must have been to hold worship services in Plumer Hall. It will be set up much as it used to be prior to 1996. Pastor Sarah will be preaching and Communion will be celebrated. We will be there on the 15th, and our Earth Day Sunday service on April 22 may/may not be back in the sanctuary.

I’m sure that all of the members of the Building Task Force join me in looking forward to the building dedication at the end of summer.

Now, what about worship? There have been small changes over the years in the pieces that make up our service, but now is the opportunity to re-examine what we might update or change. Are there pieces that no longer feel “worshipful”? Twelve years ago, I was told by several sources never to change the “Gathering Song.” Is that still true today for this or other pieces? You have a vested interest in this. Let us know your thoughts.

The Worship Renewal Task Force created a survey about this, and there is a link to it in this newsletter. You will also find one in the Weekly Message from Michael. There are hard copies in the narthex, and a Deacon can get you one right away. Help us to refresh our service and bring more of the arts into worship as well.

I am excited about seeing all this unfold. And, this brings me to a last topic: My health. I’m asked quite frequently about how I am doing with Parkinson’s. I can say that I wish I weren’t dealing with it, but it is a reality, and it falls along two lines.

First, the shaking in my right arm is annoying, prevents me from writing at times, and I’ve learned not to terrify friends by ordering soup when we are out to dinner.

Second, the medications help, but they sometimes rob me of short-term memory and I have trouble searching for words.

I’m not as steady as I was…I’m a little slower…etc., etc. See, the feedback I get after answering people’s questions points to the fact that I am now a 63 year-old guy with the same stuff we all face as we grow older. Therefore, onward and upward. Pastor Sarah and I will be planning a Confirmation class that will end just over a year from now, and I am looking forward to reconnecting with our younger people.

A time is coming when I know that I will need to step back and retire. But, that time is not yet now. I am in touch with a few key leaders, and we promised to be honest about this. Carl and I feel so loved and supported by this congregation. Thank you for your concern!

We are taking a post-Easter break and cruising up to Canada with six friends we met last summer who also like to travel. Carl and I are also seeing friends and family along the way. I will return to see you in church on April 15!

Yours,
Pastor Paul
Family - a word with many meanings. Some are traditional - “all the descendants of a common ancestor; a group consisting of parents and children living together in a household.” Some are more expansive - “a group of people usually of the same blood (but do not have to be) who genuinely love, trust, care about, and look out for each other”; or “a family is what you make it.”

I have had the privilege of experiencing both definitions of family. Recently, Keith and I gathered with our children, their spouses, and grandchildren for a lovely weekend getaway on the Pajaro Dunes in Watsonville, California. We laughed, played games, shared meals, remembered old stories and adventures, and created new memories. It truly was a weekend full of fun and family (see photos below).

Keith and I are also fortunate to have other “families” in our lives. We have friends from Keith’s time as a college professor - friends with whom we share annual events like the Boyum Tree Admiration party. Those friends now have children and grandchildren and so that circle of friendship and family has expanded.

Over 50 years ago, Keith, as part of a student exchange program, lived for six weeks with an English family. His English “Mum and Dad” are now gone, but the son and daughter and their children and grandchildren are an important part of both of our lives. Over the 50 plus years, we have had the pleasure of visiting them over a dozen times. This summer, our English family will spend the better part of August with us. The “elderly” of the group will share stories, share food and drink and revel in the joy of the next generations coming together. Our son and daughter will spend time with their generational counterparts, and our grandchildren will play in our “garden” and enjoy the joys of the sunshine and beaches of California. We are looking forward to this family time!

Yet another family we treasure is our IUCC family! It truly is a group of people “who genuinely love, trust, care about, and look out for each other.” Recently some of the IUCC family gathered to remember Roger Laule, a long-time member of the church and the choir. At the gathering, friends of Roger shared stories about him and what IUCC meant to him. As I sat there listening to the remembrances, I laughed and shed tears as many talked about how this church was Roger’s family - and how this church welcomes those who may be alone and in need of love, care, and companionship.

Most Sundays we are reminded by the worship leader that IUCC is an “open and affirming” church and that no matter where you on your journey that you are welcome here. The remarks shared at the gathering were a powerful reminder to me and to others in the room, that this faith community truly makes a difference.

So family is what you make it - I hope you will reach out to others and enjoy an expansive family. I look forward to sharing more special moments with my IUCC family in the future!

In faith and community,

Renae
First, I want to offer so many thanks to all those who supported and helped with last month’s guest speaker, Amy-Jill Levine – what an amazing experience! My thanks to Karen Smith & Kathi Smith and their dinner crew – Jessie Billings, Faren and Phoebe Eng, Sandy Exelby, Tommie Kozlov, and Pat Sauter; Cheryl Trobiani and Christine Roy in the parking lot; Sarah Fiske-Phillips, Tom Key, and Mary Swope with registration. And especially the Sponsors and Underwriters, and the Plumer Adult Education Endowment Fund for financial generosity. IUCC impressed Amy-Jill with our welcome!

Adult Sunday School will NOT meet on Easter Sunday, April 1. And when worship moves into Plumer Hall for construction beginning April 8, we will move into the large preschool classroom for a few weeks. On April 8, I’ll revisit a topic from earlier this year and see if there are “Lessons from Lost Christianities.”

I’ll be away on April 15, but plan to get together for a self-guided conversation on what’s next – what would you like to see and hear in adult Sunday school in 2018? I’ll be back on April 22 to begin a few weeks on what scholar Philip Jenkins calls “the Crucible Era” – 250-50 BCE. (Amy-Jill Levine wrote a nice jacket blurb for his book!)

I’ve begun to re-organize the church library – did you know that IUCC has a church library? It’s located in Plumer Hall and contains a variety of interesting and helpful resources. My first task has been to find and shelve books by past and present members, from Bil Aulenbach to Roger Johnson.

Second, I collected all the books written by past guest speakers – and there are a lot, including a number of Jesus Seminar texts. You’ll find all these on the first shelves on the left as you enter. The rest… I’m still working on. But feel free to peruse and borrow!

And thank you to all who participated in our Lenten series of discussions, sermons, and Sunday-morning rehashing, on Resolutions from last summer’s UCC General Synod. I hope you have a better sense of how our denomination responds to critical social issues.

Special thanks to Rachel McCallum, David Karsten, Dr. Gudrun Magnusdottir, Dave Smith of Advocates for Peace & Justice, and members of the GREENfaith Team who shared their unique perspectives on Wednesday evenings!

Tuesday Bible Study is continuing to wander through the Gospel of Luke – we’ll be entering chapter 10, and soon we’ll encounter some of Luke’s most familiar and loved parables. As always, Ken Wyant balances serious scholarship with jokes and puns – all designed to help us think!

Comma Groups are wrapping up this month, with a light lunch and conversation on April 29. Let your Group Leader know if you’ll be attending! We’ll evaluate how things went this year and look ahead to next year. Sign-ups will begin this summer!
On March 9, IUCC was honored to welcome Professor Amy-Jill Levine, a renowned New Testament scholar and Orthodox Jew. Both knowledgeable and funny, Dr. Levine provided a fascinating look at Jesus as a Jewish man: what he believed, what he would have sounded like, and why he would have challenged the authorities of his time.

“I am not seeking to erase the differences between Judaism and Christianity – but I want to look at the similarities,” she said.

Raised as a Jewish girl in a heavily Catholic neighborhood, she longed to take first communion and wear a pretty dress like her friends did. The course of her life changed one day when a kid on the bus said, “You killed our lord.” He said that's what his priest told him. She thought it must be true because she believed if a priest told a lie, his clerical collar would choke him. She went home crying and her mother calmed her down, but she decided to go to catechism class to find out where the hateful teaching came from, because she wanted to stop it.

Years of catechism followed, and she was amazed at how similar Jesus' story was to the stories she'd heard about Moses. Jesus’ criticism of the practices of other Jews reminded her of what Moses had said and done.

“People choose how to read, and we can choose to read the text benevolently or malevolently,” she said. “We can read the text with love for Jews, not hate. I can use the New Testament to fill gaps in Jewish history.”

“Jews are a people – it's an ethnic identity. Jews can disagree, and it doesn't matter because we're all still Jews. Even when we disagree, we're all in it together. Jews couldn't own land, so we became a verbal people. In Protestant culture, it's the height of rudeness to interrupt, but not so for us. We miscue. When Jesus argues, he's just being Jewish. What something means to one person can mean something else to others. Jesus stays within the Jewish environment, eats like a Jew, abides by Jewish law. He follows Torah as he understands it, but he disagrees with various traditions.”

She believes the “Our Father” is essentially a Jewish prayer. “Jesus called God Father, not Abba (Daddy). Our Father is the one sitting in heaven, not the emperor. Hallowed be thy name. God's name is ineffable, unpronounceable. Jesus' God was open and free, not singular. There is nothing in the prayer that a Jew cannot say. It is a perfectly good Jewish prayer.”

She doesn't believe that being a non-Christian will keep her out of heaven. “Doing the will of the Father, I feel I’ve earned my way. The Jewish Jesus is more concerned about how I treat my neighbor. He is more concerned about what I do, not what I believe.”

Dr. Levine concluded, “At the end of the day, the Bible is to be cherished and debated.”

She came to us with the gracious cooperation of Chapman University, where she was the featured speaker at their Founders Day event. Her Friday night talk was preceded by a dinner in Plumer Hall that included an interfaith Shabbat led by Rabbi Arnie Rachlis and Pastor Paul.

Dr. Levine’s name has been engraved on IUCC’s plaque of distinguished guest speakers, which hangs in our narthex.

Special kudos to the Rev. Steve Swope, the Plumer Foundation, and a hardworking team of volunteers for making this outstanding opportunity available to us!
“Behold! Paying Attention, Being Astonished, Embracing Mystery”
IUCC Women’s Retreat, May 4–6, 2018

Make plans now for a weekend of “Behold!” moments with fellow IUCC women at the annual retreat, May 4–6 at Pilgrim Pines. Registration begins April 8 for three weeks only!

Living well involves attention and astonishment. Spending sacred time in the mountains can attune our eyes, ears, and hearts to wonders we might otherwise overlook. Some mysteries in life are so beautiful there is no explaining them—they take our breath away, and there is only silent awe. These are “Behold!” moments. Gather in sisterhood as we behold creation and Creator alike.

This year’s retreat leader is the Rev. Dr. Jill A. Kirchner-Rose, senior minister at Redlands United Church of Christ (pictured above). She earned her Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies from the University of California at Riverside, a Master of Divinity from Yale Divinity School, and a Doctorate of Ministry in Preaching from Chicago Theological Seminary. Jill is married to Karen Rose. They have an 8 year old daughter, Daniella, and a cocker spaniel puppy, Ace. Jill enjoys time with family, tennis, golf, reading, nature and sacred moments throughout the day to “behold” the mysteries of creation.

Watch for online registration at iucc.org and on the patio after worship services in April. Don’t delay! Space is limited!

For questions and information, contact retreat planners, Lorraine Fox, Karen Smith, Pat Sauter, or Laura Long.

~ Laura Long

Have you taken the survey?
If not, please do!
We need your opinion!

The Worship Renewal Task Force is asking for your opinions with regard to how we might renew our worship service. This includes exploring how we might incorporate more arts into the services, looking at how we use technology, re-examining our current service, and other pieces that make up worship at IUCC.

As members of a Congregational church, your opinions are vital! Your input will help us identify opportunities to create dynamic and meaningful worship at IUCC. We encourage you to complete the survey. It will appear in the Friday e-blast for the next four weeks and there will be paper copies available for those of you who prefer pen and ink. You can also access it by clicking here: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSe_mzkCKkLpH4SSI1EVZpok7sr3FUv4q5GiO2E-XCW_ILNSkA/viewform

Your thoughts will go far to help shape the future of how we do worship at IUCC. The deadline for completing the survey is April 13.

With thanks,

The Worship Renewal Task Force
John St. Marie and Paul Tellström, co-chairs
Joni Baker * Lauren Fleming * Frank Lyman *
Craig Tyrl * Lesley Wheland
All-Church Baseball Outing
photos courtesy of Sarah Fiske-Phillips
Building Project Update
by Anne Rosse, Chair of Building Task Force

Construction progress may have seemed slow but that will definitely change in April. We have a busy, busy month ahead of us! Below is a list of the key happenings:

April 2  Installation of sprinklers in the Sanctuary and Narthex begins – because of this, our April 8 and April 15 worship services will be moved to Plumer Hall.
April 4  The foundation will be poured.
April 6  Steel columns will go up.
April 9  Framing will begin and should take approximately 30 days.
April 16 Painting of the Sanctuary and Narthex begins with the new colors coordinated to the new addition’s color palette.
April 20 The Sanctuary re-opens.

Looking ahead, in May, we can expect to see the new addition tied into our existing structure, along with roofing and installation of HVAC.

In June, we can expect to see the Alton driveway improvements and paving.

In July, we can expect to see landscape and irrigation installation. We anticipate that construction will wrap up in late July, with occupancy scheduled for early August. Once the current Church Office is vacated, remodeling of it into a new classroom for our busy preschool can begin.

Please note that some of these dates may shift as the project progresses. Please contact btfchair@iucc.org with any questions.

OAC (Owner, Architect & Contractor) meetings continue to take place weekly with Michael Spindle, Jim Raver, Pastor Paul, Mark Allen and Anne Rosse representing IUCC. We give thanks and gratitude for their dedication and invaluable expertise.

We will dedicate the new building and thank this church community for its generosity and vision for IUCC’s future on Sunday, September 9. Please mark your calendars and plan to join us for this important celebration in the life of this church!

Speaking of generosity, your continued speedy payment of campaign pledges is deeply appreciated and helps IUCC stay financially stable. As of the end of February, we have already received more than $1 million in pledge payments, which represents a whopping 83% toward the $1.275 million pledged. Thank you, thank you, thank you!

Please don’t forget that we are still actively raising money so, if you haven’t joined your church family in supporting this project, we invite you to do so today. Or, perhaps you have completed your pledge and find that you can give just a little more. We still need to raise $75,000. Please contact capitalcampaign@iucc.org or the Church Office to make a new or amended pledge.

Over the next few months, our new building will finally take shape as we plan for how, supported by strengthened facilities, we can grow in community significance through strong programs and service to our community.

Thank you for your patience, for your generosity, and for your vision for our beloved church. Watch us build for IUCC’s future!
I’ve never lived on a farm. I’ve never bought large sacks of seeds, planted them in black-earth fields, and waited ... and waited. Waited. For. Rain. Without rain, the cost and the work is all for naught. The closest I’ve come to that anxiety is here in low rain, desert Southern California.

When I hear drip ... drip ...drip, I get excited. When I see the shine that rain brings to everything it touches, I am happy. When the trees, foliage, and flowers grow, I’m thrilled. Guess I’m kind of like a farmer.

These thoughts lead me to **Earth Day, Sunday, April 22nd**. We’ve celebrated Earth Day for three years at IUCC. Has it made a difference? Have you changed one habit/action since last year? Are you more educated regarding climate change? I hope we can all respond in the affirmative. Once again our worship services that Sunday will focus on the care of the earth. The sermon, music, children’s story, and decoration will all convey the message that we are a GREENfaith/Creation Justice church.

A second special day in April is **Arbor Day, April 27th**. In 1872, J. Sterling Morton proposed to the Nebraska Board of Agriculture that a special day be set aside for the planting of trees. This holiday, called Arbor Day, was first observed with the planting of more than a million trees in Nebraska, and is now observed throughout the nation and the world. Wherever trees are planted, they are a source of joy and spiritual renewal. I love trees. My favorite childhood “thinking” place was under the large Weeping Willow tree in our yard.

Trees reduce the erosion of our precious topsoil by wind and water, cut heating and cooling costs, moderate the temperature, clean the air, produce life-giving oxygen, and provide habitat for wildlife. Trees are a renewable resource giving us paper, wood for our homes, fuel for fires and countless other wood products. Trees in our city increase property values and beautify our community.

So, with these twin days in April – Earth Day and Arbor Day – we have great reminders of our calling to care for the earth. It is a faith issue, an ethical issue, a health issue, a civic responsibility, and more. May you and I become **Earth missionaries** in our neighborhoods, communities, country and world!

Earth Day is every day!

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**Vivian Elaine Johnson**

(GREENfaith team: Judy Curry, Tony Dover, Nancy Dreckman, Howard Emery, Carol Getz, Martha Hansen, Bonnie Shaffstall, Eileen Vincent, and Vivian Johnson)

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**Some things to consider:**

Are you conserving water?

What is one additional thing you could do?

What does Malibu, CA, have in common with Miami Beach, FL? They, plus several other cities, banned the use of plastic straws in restaurants because of their detriment to our oceans. How about telling your favorite restaurant?

Would you like to give the gift of a tree?

For mothers/fathers day or for a birthday, anniversary, or graduation?
**GODSPELL**  
The Wayward Artist

A little over a year ago, I told my beloved Comma Group of the last four years that I was going to start a theatre company. It is hard to believe, but The Wayward Artist is about to produce its first season, and our opening show is *Godspell* by Stephen Schwartz. It runs April 13-29 at the Grand Central Art Center, 125 N. Broadway, Santa Ana.

Our first season has been organized and planned by the theme of Faith. The company is grounded on my personal faith. There is also the faith we have in each other as an ensemble of artists. There is the dramatic faith which constitutes the plots of our inaugural season. Finally, there is the leap of faith this entire adventure represents. The Wayward Artist is a home for the wayward artist—the lost, the naked the vulnerable.

We produce wayward work of the highest quality—works re-invented, works forgotten, works unknown. We transform a wayward community—its arrogance, its ignorance, its complacency. Guided by this mission, we are in search of our wayward family.

IUCC has been my faith family for almost a decade. I would be remiss not to invite my church family to our inaugural production. The show is spectacularly good. Several of the cast will be singing as part of morning worship at IUCC on April 8th. Our wayward ensemble could use your support.

Please know you are invited. For tickets and more information, please visit [www.thewaywardartist.org](http://www.thewaywardartist.org)  
God is indeed still speaking!

**Craig Tyril**  
IUCC member and Artistic Director, The Wayward Artist

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**Music Ministry**  
by Joni Baker

Spring has sprung, the Easter Bunny has delivered, and Jesus has risen! Now what? It is time for the Chancel Choir to begin the push to prepare for the Spring concert, which you won’t want to miss.

This concert will be a particularly wonderful opportunity to introduce friends to IUCC. John St. Marie has selected music which will highlighting our UCC designations: Open and Affirming, Just Peace, Global Mission, and Creation Justice/Green Faith. Concert goers will receive an education about each designation and what it means to our congregation. Please come on Sunday, June 10th at 7:00 p.m.

**Rise Above**  
AIDS WALK OC 2018

**Sign up for IUCC’s Walk the Walkers**  
AIDS Walk Team!

This year, the OC AIDS Walk will mark its 32nd anniversary and our theme will be “Rise Above.” Why? Because this year we’re ready to Rise Above AIDS and remind everyone that, together, we can lift each other up to overcome the epidemic. It’s taking place on May 5 at scenic William Mason Park on the corner of Culver and University in Irvine, and you won’t want to miss it!

Let’s get an early start and make IUCC Walk the Walkers the Number One faith-based team again. Here’s the link to sign up for Team IUCC: [https://www.classy.org/team/154805](https://www.classy.org/team/154805) Just register, send out emails to everyone you know ... and start bringing in the bucks for this very worthwhile cause. Invite your friends and family to walk (or run), too; the more, the merrier!

So, get out your aviator glasses, zip up that flight suit... and let’s get our Walk on!!

Peace,  
**Felicity Figueroa**
Get to know IUCC on the web and through social media!

Wondering when the next Bible Study class is or how to sign up for the next guest speaker? You don't have to wait for Michael's Friday e-mail or the monthly newsletter created by Tricia Aynes. Information is updated regularly on the church website iucc.org and often available on both the public Facebook page (www.facebook.com/irvineucc) or the private group page, which you have to ask to join (search for Group page for Irvine United Congregational Church).

Your suggestions for what should be included on the website and the Facebook page or group are always welcome. You can help shape both and offer other ideas for how to communicate IUCC's message by joining the Communications Ministry. Contact Cindy O'Dell for more information at odellcindy19@gmail.com.

Want a Cookie? Of course you do!

We love to gather round the snack table after church and visit with friends. The cookies, fruit, cheese, crackers, and other snacks are the perfect complement to our warm and vibrant congregation, and they help make all of us feel warm and welcome. But wait - they do not appear by magic! The tasty treats are provided by smiling and generous volunteers like you. If we don't have sign-ups, we don't have snacks - it's as simple as that. Don't let it happen here! Won't you add your name to the calendar? Sign up sheets are on the patio on Sunday mornings. If each of us committed to one Sunday each year, our calendar - and our tummies - would be full. Thank you!

Women's Fellowship
Wednesday, April 4
Women's Fellowship meets the first Wednesday evening of the month for fun and a light dinner. See Pat Sauter for more information.

Isaiah House
Wednesday, April 11, 4:00 p.m.
Volunteers serving a meal at Isaiah House meet on the 2nd Wednesday of each month to provide a meal for the residents. Call (949) 436-1946 for more info.

The Seeker's Women's Group
Tuesday, April 17, 9:30 a.m.
This dynamic group of our senior women meets on the third Tuesday of each month to share coffee, discuss relevant religious and theological topics, and morning treats. Contact Reefa at reefahanny@comline.com for more information.

4/22 Betty Billings
4/07 Jim Carse
4/29 Natasha Dahline
4/17 David Deshler
4/19 Janice Gately
4/13 Dick Henderson
4/29 Linda Hidy
4/15 Janice Johnson
4/07 Lee KeslerWest
4/21 Dale Lang
4/15 Connor McDonald
4/07 Jennifer Mirmak
4/22 Steve O'Dell
4/18 Jim Raver
4/22 Cheryl Schou
4/07 Paul Tellstrom
4/30 Mark Willcox
4/28 Ellen Woolfson
On March 23-25, Troop 602 participated in the annual Rancho San Joaquin District Camporee at Firestone Scout Reservation with several other troops from the Irvine area which comprises of the Rancho San Joaquin district. Troop 602 did real well at Camporee by getting 100% in all events and finishing in 1st place in the Fire Starting relay with a winning time of 3:20. As a result of their win, the Scouts of Troop 602 were awarded with a first place ribbon from the Camporee staff to place on their troop flag. This is the first ever Camporee blue ribbon in Troop 602’s history.

In the evening campfire ceremony, Troop 602 entertained the huge evening campfire crowd of Scouts and leaders with a funny skit that was selected by the Camporee skit audition staff of judges. Their skit was among four out of thirty five auditions that were selected for presentation. Later on in the campfire ceremony, Senior Patrol Leader and Life Scout Felix T. was called out as an Ordeal candidate for the Order of the Arrow, Scouting’s National Honor Society. Felix is the 2nd Scout in the history of Troop 602 to be inducted into the Order of the Arrow.

Are you looking for a fun, outdoor based education and leadership program for your child? Sign them up for Scouting by joining Troop 602. Troop 602 meets on Thursday nights inside of Plumer Hall at 7:00pm. Troop 602 does one outdoor overnight outing per month and this summer will be going to Schoepe Scout Reservation at Lost Valley for an entire week in late June. For more information about Troop 602, contact Matt Mirmak, Troop 602’s Chartered Organization Representative, at irvineeaglescout1987@gmail.com

It’s now easier than ever to sign up for Troop 602. You don’t have to wait until school starts or ends to sign up. You can sign up for Scouting at any time during the year. If you sign up this month, you will have an opportunity to attend the International Camporee at Mataguay Scout Reservation in Warner Springs on the weekend May 18-20. At this campout, you will get a great once in a lifetime opportunity to interact with Scouts from all over the world. Why wait?
Sign up for Troop 602 today! How to sign up for Troop 602 in five easy steps:

1) Go to beascout.org and choose Boy Scouts
2) Type in zip code 92604 in the search field
3) Look for Troop 0602, Irvine United Congregational Church and click Show Unit
4) Click Apply Now and fill out your child’s information
5) Join us on Thursday nights at 7 p.m. and be a part of the outdoor fun that is Scouting.
In the past month, you may have read or have heard the story of Logan Blythe, a 15 year old Life Scout with Down Syndrome from the Utah National Parks Council. His story became national news because the Utah National Parks Council, the council that Logan's Boy Scout troop is affiliated with, "denied him the rank of Eagle Scout," "demoted him to Cub Scout," and "revoked his merit badges" according to the various news sources that reported this story. While I will be the first to admit that the Boy Scouts of America has not had the most stellar of records when it comes to the issue of discrimination, I do know that dating back to my days as a youth member and my current tenure as an adult volunteer, the Boy Scouts have always been more than accommodating to youth with physical and mental disabilities. When I saw these headlines from various news sources, I had a gut feeling that there had to be more to the story that what was being reported.

It turned out that none of these claims made by the media were true. (BSA National has already released a statement on this matter https://www.scoutingnewsroom.org/blog/bsa-clears-misconceptions-path-eagle-scout-rank-utah-scout-down-syndrome/) It would be easy to call this story “fake news” and completely dismiss the merits of the entire story. Unfortunately, after 108 years of existence, there are still a number of people in this country who are not familiar with the Boy Scout program.

It turned out that Logan Blythe had submitted his Eagle Scout project proposal to be reviewed by his council’s advancement committee for approval. One of the requirements to earn the rank of Eagle Scout is “(w)hile a Life Scout, plan, develop, and give leadership to others in a service project helpful to any religious institution, any school, or your community. (The project must benefit an organization other than Boy Scouting.) A project proposal must be approved by the organization benefiting from the effort, your unit leader and unit committee, and the council or district before you start.”

Whatever problems the council advancement committee had with his Eagle Scout project was not specified in the story. I will attest based on my personal experience, as an Eagle Scout and current adult volunteer, that rejections of Eagle Scout project proposals are quite common. I remember having to submit three drafts of my project proposal before it was finally approved. The process is quite specific and detail oriented. This requirement can be very labor intensive for a teenager because they are the ones that are supposed “to plan, develop, and lead.” This also explains why only 2.4 million youth have earned the rank of Eagle Scout since the first award was presented to Arthur Eldred in 1912. A rejection of an Eagle Scout project proposal does NOT deny anyone the rank of Eagle Scout. It’s just a message that the Scout is going to need to be more specific in their proposal before it is approved. Not an easy task, but certainly not impossible to achieve.

In my years of Scouting, I have never seen anyone lose a rank or be demoted to Cub Scout. The writers must have mistaken the BSA for the US Armed Forces. Once a Scout earn their rank, they’ve earned it. Period. I’ve also never heard of anyone getting their merit badges “revoked.” The council advancement committee and the national advancement committee would have the power to reverse decisions on merit badges if they have irrefutable proof that a merit badge counselor was cutting corners on requirements with the intent of committing fraud. In Logan Blythe’s case, he still has the merit badges that he’s earned according to BSA National. There was no fraud or malice involved in his case.

I’ve seen youth with physical and mental disabilities do amazing things in this program. I’ve seen them go through the challenges of Ordeal weekend with the Order of the Arrow, Scouting’s National Honor Society, and the challenges that present themselves in the advancement process on the trail to Eagle Scout. I have also had the privilege of attending some of these Scouts’ Eagle Scout Court of Honor. No Boy Scout troop that I know, especially Troop 602, segregates their Scouts with physical or mental disabilities. In our troop, we treat these Scouts as equals.

One of the great things for Logan and for any Scout who has a physical and/or mental disability is that there have always been accommodations made for them in their advancement trail to Eagle Scout. Logan still has time to earn the rank of Eagle Scout even if he passes his 18th birthday. What was a misunderstanding between the council advancement committee and the leadership of Logan’s troop turned into a bigger story than it should have been. While his Eagle Scout project was rejected, I hope he finds a way to turn that rejection into an approval. If he is like any Eagle Scout candidate I’ve known, he’ll get there and get his Eagle Scout badge and ribbon in no time. The trail to Eagle Scout is challenging, but not impossible to achieve regardless of physical and/or mental disabilities.

For more information about how the Boy Scouts of America works with youth with physical and/or mental disabilities, please visit:
https://www.scouting.org/resources/guide-to-advancement/special-needs/
We're continuing our discussion of helping our children develop the skills necessary to maintain “civility” in challenging interactions, both for their own personal well-being and to allow them to contribute to encouraging civil environments. We’ve been considering the usefulness of assertive responses to “uncivil” behavior as a way to communicate personal strength while not resorting to crude, unkind, or hurtful verbal interactions. Once learned, these skills are helpful in all interpersonal situations when tension and differences arise and cause unpleasantness, including friendships, classrooms, playgrounds, jobs, meetings, and later in more intimate relationships.

To review, assertive behavior involves standing up for your personal rights and expressing your thoughts, feelings, and beliefs in direct, honest, respectful ways which do not violate the rights of others. Assertiveness involves respect (but not deference) for yourself by expressing your needs and defending your rights, while respecting the needs, rights, thoughts, feelings, and beliefs of others.

Following are some examples of “ways of responding” to unkind, nasty, rude, provocative speech from others that can help to keep the interaction more “civil”:

1. Speak in the first person rather than talking about the other person. “I think; I want; I feel; I need; I expect; I would prefer; I have decided, the consequence of what you said is that I will, I am asking you to, etc.”. It is natural for others to get defensive or become even more angry when comments are about them, so keep the comments about yourself.

2. Accept responsibility for your part in anything that might have contributed to the situation or interaction becoming so unpleasant.

3. Do not use the uncivil behavior of others as an excuse for your own uncivil behavior. It doesn’t matter how others are talking as far as how you decide to talk.

4. Use “free information” to calm things down. Sometimes in the midst of ranting about something the person who is spewing unkind words gives “clues” about why things bother them. Rather than talking about what they are saying, even though it is upsetting to you, talk about what you learned about why they are upset as a way to change the discussion and show care for them as a person.

5. Stay away from “yes” or “no” questions and ask “open-ended” questions, such as: “Do you know why you are treating me this way?” or “How do you think I feel when you talk to me like this?”

6. Give some suggestions for cooling things down, like: “why don't we each sit down for a minute without talking, or leave the room for a minute and get a drink of water, or write things down for each other instead of yelling and being unkind.”

7. Sometimes it’s just a good idea to say nothing, until the other person runs out of steam, or it becomes clear they are not able to hear anything you say without striking out.

8. Try using “nonverbal” communication if words are causing the problem or are not being heard. Put your hand up with a “stop” gesture, hold your hands out to the side to indicate there’s nothing you can do to please them, etc.

9. Try “fogging”: accept that what they are saying might be correct and reserve your right to disagree; don’t bother defending yourself; don’t counterattack.

10. If they are carrying on about something you can’t do anything about, turn the pressure for a resolution on them. “Sorry, I know I’m short, what do you suggest?” “Do you have a way for me to see without glasses?” You get the idea. Practice ideas with your kids based on real situations they face.
It’s Easter season when the church spends a great deal of time talking about “resurrection.” PCs don’t believe in a literal resurrection, for a variety of reasons:

1. Dead is dead, meaning there is no life. In the real world, it is impossible to make dead alive. Ask science.
2. Some 15 years after Jesus died, St. Paul discusses “resurrection” but not as an event, rather as a concept. (More later.)
3. It is 60 years after the death of Jesus (90+ CE) when the second Gospel, Matthew, tells the first known story about Jesus’ resurrection.
4. Of the 23 gospels, only 4 talk about a resurrection (Matthew, Luke, John and Peter).
5. Each story is different.
6. The original Gospel of Mark stopped at 16:8 and simply said, “He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him.” Much later, redactors added a resurrection story. (Mark 16:9-20)
7. In the Bible and religious-history, important “truth” is found inside the story.
8. Resurrection stories are all a metaphor: Jesus’ message can transform our lives, daily. This is the power of Easter!
9. A dead man walking around “scaring” people is fiction.
10. Jesus’ agape is still transforming lives daily, 2,000 years after he died, stone-cold dead. But his message lives on.

Let’s take a fast look at what Matthew, Luke, John and Peter say happened on that first Easter morning. All tell a tale about a Joseph of Arimathea (a fictional character/story) who talked Pilate into releasing Jesus’ body to him to “bury” in his very expensive “hewn out of a rock” tomb. In the real Roman world, this could have never occurred.

Only Matthew and Peter have guards at the entrance of the tomb. Early Sunday, four of the gospels have Mary of Magdala going to the tomb. All but John have other women going with her, suggesting they are going to “prepare” the body again (supposedly Joseph had done it earlier).

Matthew speaks about an earthquake moving the heavy stone. Peter uses a “heavenly” force. The other two gospel writers say it had been rolled away. John and Luke have two messengers/angels to greet them. Three gospels have only one “greeter.” All say, “He is not here.” Four say he “was raised.” John at first claims, “I don’t know where they have put him.” Five verses later Jesus says, “I am ascending to my Father…” (20:17)

Some 50 to 90 years after Jesus died, the early church finally has a resurrection story…five of them, all fiction. But all tell a great truth: The “Easter” message is all about the great transformations that take place in our lives as we continually dole our agape love.

Peace Love Joy Hope

Here’s a peek at the PC summer class offerings. All will be taught on Wednesday evenings from 7:15 to 9:15 p.m. and repeated on Thursday mornings from 9:15 to 11:15 a.m. One can switch classes and receive the same info. Flyers/Registration will be ready in May.

- “The Historical Jesus”: June 13/14, 20/21, 27/28
- “Learning the Art of Midrash (interpretation) Using the Gospel of John”: July 11/12, 18/19, 25/26, Aug. 1/7

The Eight Points of Progressive Christianity:

By calling ourselves Progressive Christians, we mean we are Christians who...

1. Believe that following the path and the teachings of Jesus can lead to an awareness and experience of the Sacred and Oneness of Unity of life;
2. Affirm that the teachings of Jesus provide but one of the many ways to experience the Sacredness and Oneness of life, and that we can draw from diverse sources of wisdom in our spiritual journey;
3. Seek community that is inclusive of ALL people, including but not limited to: * Conventional Christians and questioning skeptics, * Believers and agnostics, * Women and men, * Those of all sexual orientations and gender identities, * Those of all classes and abilities;
4. Know that the way we behave towards one another is the fullest expression of what we believe;
5. Find grace in the search for understanding and believe there is more value in questioning than in absolutes;
6. Strive for peace and justice among all people;
7. Strive to protect and restore the integrity of our Earth;
8. Commit to a path of life-long learning, compassion and selfless love.
It's baseball season again. You know what that means, don't you? It means there's a whole five months until football season begins. How unfortunate. Anyway, here are some films you might want to watch while the Angels are not in the outfield. Well, the Angels or…. whoever.

1) *The Pride of the Yankees* (Sam Wood-1942) This wartime tearjerker features Gary Cooper as Yankee Clipper Lou Gehrig facing the wickedest curve ball he ever faced: a disease that bears his name.

2) *The Stratton Story* (Sam Wood-1949) This postwar tearjerker features James Stewart as White Sox hurler Monty Stratton. After losing a leg in a hunting accident, Stratton successfully returns to pitching in the minor leagues. For me, this is simply another reminder of why I like Jimmy Stewart so much.

3) *Fear Strikes Out* (Robert Mulligan-1957) A disturbing portrait of Jimmy Piersall, a 50s-era Red Sox centerfielder who suffered from uncontrolled bipolar disorder. It features Anthony Perkins in a haunting performance given a few years before he ran the Bates Motel.

4) *The Bad News Bears* (Michael Ritchie-1976) This comedy of little league misfits features Walter Matthau at his curmudgeonly best and Tatum O’Neal as an eleven-year-old pain in his side.

5) *The Natural* (Barry Levinson-1984) Based on Bernard Malamud's novel, *The Natural* is as beautiful a baseball film as I have ever seen. Robert Redford's walk-off homer. You know, the one that shatters the lights? It still leaves me breathless.


9) *Baseball* (Ken Burns-1994) Ken Burn's sweeping multi-episode history of America’s pastime takes us from the game's earliest roots through a century of its most miraculous milestones.

10) *Sugar* (Anna Boden & Ryan Fleck-2008) The story of a promising young pitcher from the Dominican Republic. He begins his professional career in Iowa, a place so far from his Caribbean origins that no map can successfully illustrate the distance.